

Beach Tourism in KZN – Sun and Sand Potential

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1. Introduction

The management of Tourism KwaZulu-Natal have decided to issue occasional papers to the tourism trade on the core findings of its research and other projects. The purpose of these papers is to stimulate more debate regarding the findings or progress of such projects as well as to ensure wider awareness of key research findings.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the existing enormous beach tourism sector and the further potential for beach tourism development in KwaZulu-Natal.

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2. Background

Sun, sea, sand, blue skies and warm salt water oceans – an ideal recipe to offer people as an antidote to overwork stress, the cold of the northern hemisphere winters, and something which the province of KZN has in abundance.

Beach tourism worldwide is a significant and growing tourism/holiday option, and for good reason. The pressures and speed of modern-day existence are the cause of many ills and one of the ways human beings select to deal with these are to disengage completely from the everyday and opt out into warmth, relaxation, the sound of waves, the sight of the horizon unspoilt by the constructions of man.

KwaZulu-Natal is a destination which offers over 600 kms of coastline and three of its designated tourist destination areas offer coastal experiences – the South Coast, the North Coast and the Elephant Coast. However, before looking more closely at each of these three in terms of the potential for growth in coastal and beach tourism, it is important to consider who the users of such places might be, and who the tourists to such destinations are.

3. Tourists and Infrastructure

People have been attracted to the sea for as long as they have existed on this earth. The first formal 'tour', though, was conducted by none other than Thomas Cook back in the 19th Century, in July 1841 (Feifer, 1985, 167-168) when he took a small group of people from London to Loughborough by train in order to escape, just for a short time, the evils of urbanisation. A while

later on, mass tourism began, aimed at destinations such as Brighton, on the English Coast. Even so, the numbers were small, but they began to increase, slowly, then rapidly, as the benefits of a holiday by the sea were heralded by word of mouth and through the media, by the tourists themselves and by those who provided the services to them. By 1844 almost 15 000 passengers travelled from London to Brighton on the three days of the Easter holidays alone (Holloway, 1989, 26).

Seaside resorts on the Continent also gained in popularity and recreational tourism journeys to the seaside, proving an important behavior pattern in Europe, began to be exhibited in South Africa also.

Well-known geographer, Jeff McCarthy, wrote of the rapid growth of coastal resort areas in the then Natal, and that “in the 1960s and 1970s, dozens of smaller towns and hamlets experienced rapid growth with hotels, flats and holiday cottages servicing the vacation needs”, and that “coastal Local Authorities... are dominated by recreational land use... (houses, flats and hotels)” (1989, 273).

In Kenya, too, Rajotte (1987, 81) stated that “The fastest growth has been in the coastal resorts”.

Far more recently though, studies and surveys have shown significant interest in and travel to beach holiday destinations in South Africa and, for the purposes of this paper, KwaZulu-Natal, and it is this phenomenon which is considered here.

In the first survey undertaken by Tourism KZN, in 1998, it was found that some 37% of all foreign visitors to the province spent time at a beach destination. That equated to approximately 185 000. Similarly, 34% of the domestic visitors to KZN destinations spent time on the beach. However, this equated to 2.96 million people. This increased significantly percentage-wise by 2000 to 47% of all domestic visitors to KZN although the numbers had dropped, and thus this represented only 3.06 million people due to the reduction in the number of domestic tourists that year.

The percentage of foreign tourists enjoying KZN’s beaches increased to 42% in 2000, or a total of approximately 213 780. This had increased proportionally to 44% in 2001, representing about 196 137 people, but increased substantially to 68% or 680 000 in 2002. Foreign tourists had discovered KZN’s beaches!

Domestic visitors enjoying KZN’s beaches for those two years accounted for 45% and then a massive 71% in 2001 and 2002 respectively, or 2.9 million and almost 6 million in 2002!

In 2003, 73% of all foreign tourists to KZN spent some time on the beaches, representing some 876 000 people. Domestic tourists flocked to KZN’s beaches also with 71% of the total doing so in 2003, representing 9.9 million people.

Beaches, then have been shown to be the most significant single attraction in the province both in terms of foreign and with domestic tourists.

It is difficult to translate this beach-centered behavior into monetary terms. However, a general idea of the value of tourism to such destinations can be obtained by considering the 1998 and 2001 figures for three of the main beach destination areas of the province.

Table 1: Total Value of Tourism in Rand ('000 000)

	1998			2001		
	Domestic	Foreign	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Total
Durban	2 697	1 095	3 792	1 431	1 217	2 648
North Coast	731	275	1 006	477	369	846
South Coast	1 201	200	1 401	660	332	992

Source: TKZN surveys

It should also be noted though, in considering the above figures that 2001 was NOT a good year for tourism but that the industry picked up considerably in 2002 and again in 2003 in KZN. In 2002, for example, 70.2% of all domestic tourists to KZN went to the beach, representing R5.9 million! Even so, present-day beach-related tourism appears to be worth in the region of R8 billion per year to province, even excluding the Elephant Coast area.

On the supply side, KZN has experienced high value growth over the past two years, in terms of beach-related tourism infrastructure. For example, the R750 million uShaka Marine World on Durban's Point area, the R1.4 billion Sun Coast Casino on the northern end of Durban's Golden Mile and the latest addition to the Zimbali coastal resort on the North Coast with a value of R2.5 billion and consisting a five-star hotel, a second golf course, spa, beach club and luxury villas.

Research uncovered that

- Between R3.9 – R4.8B was invested in the tourism industry in KZN in 3 years, 2000 – 2003;
- This took various forms – acquisition of property, businesses mergers, new development, additions, renovations, refurbishment and the acquisition of special equipment;
- For the most part the money was privately raised in South Africa. Very little financial assistance was obtained via government grants or loans; and
- The investment comprised approximately 15% of the turnover achieved by the tourism industry for the three-year period.

Added to the 'hard' infrastructure is the value of the 'softer' offerings in the form of the annually increasing Blue Flag beaches along the KZN coast. This international award for excellence in beach management signifies compliance with a range of criteria related to safety, facilities, water quality, environmental education and management of a particular beach and is awarded annually. KZN was awarded Blue Flags for 6 of its beaches in the 2003/4 season and this number is set to increase to 7, with a further 9 pilot beaches for the 2004/5 season. Increases in the number of Blue Flag beaches act as a further incentive to attract beach holidaymakers, specifically those from Europe who are familiar and comfortable with the implications of a beach which flies a Blue Flag.

4. Recommendations

A report on beach tourism by GTKF stated that:

"after an examination of key international beach tourism source markets and trends, a sample of international beach tourism destinations and the potential South African tourism products on the Eastern Seaboard, we conclude that:

- South Africa has the product base to attract international beach tourists, including additional supporting attractions to supplement the beach product which are in line with market demand trends;
- International outbound beach tourism is a major market, particularly from Europe where some 87 million international beach holidays are taken annually, of which 9,3 million are long-haul beach holidays;
- International tourism markets are growing and although the proportion of beach holidays taken remains steady, the proportions of long haul holidays, and the proportions of beach long haul holidays taken, are growing, therefore the long haul beach market is increasing; and
- Long haul beach destinations (from Europe) are hosting from 70 000 to 1 500 000 beach tourists per annum.

* Based on the detailed research, GTKF concluded that **South Africa could host around 400 000 foreign beach tourists annually**, and that this base would grow into the future.

* This level of beach tourism would generate foreign **spending of R1.6 billion annually and some 30 000 permanent jobs**, as well as **R1.7 billion in capital spending** on accommodation developments and a further **40 000 construction jobs**. These levels of spending and job creation would increase in the future as beach tourism grows.

* South Africa would **be hosting an additional 8 800 tourists per day**, and an average of 1 100 extra foreign arrivals and departures daily **requiring 4 new daily international flight frequencies**.

* Around **4 000 extra hotel or self-catering rooms/units** would be required to support this demand in addition to the $\pm 28\,500$ rooms available in the Eastern Seaboard area.

In order to realize this type of tourism development, the following planning and interventions would be required:

- Proper spatial planning – including careful identification of two or three zones for the development of additional hotel/self-catering rooms;
- Excellent environmental management;
- Improved air access – airports and charter services;
- Some key improvements to other infrastructure – certain key roads and other basic provisions eg water, electricity, sewerage etc;
- Cooperation of key international tour operators;
- An excellent beach tourism destination marketing campaign; and
- Appropriate targeted incentives to promote investment in rooms and other tourism facilities.

Beach, and associated coastal and resort tourism, then, is an extremely valuable tourism sector in global terms and especially for KwaZulu-Natal, with significant potential for growth and development. What further research noted amongst other short-comings, however, was a lack of any resort-style amenity on the KZN coast, the desire for such an amenity, and value such an amenity could add to the tourism stable of offerings. Developers in the province would do well to heed the call for such a tourism asset in an effort to attract even greater numbers of tourists, both foreign and domestic to our shores.

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Please forward any comments regarding this paper to:

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